

John Francis Kenna Apartments
2214 East 69th Street
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1094

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
84-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ILL-1094

JOHN FRANCIS KENNA APARTMENTS

HABS
ILL,
16-CHTG,84-

Location: 2214 East 69th Street, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: Harold Pates and wife.

Present Occupants: The premises are rented.

Present Use: Apartment House.

Statement of Significance: A building of marked simplicity, the Kenna Apartment Building by Francis Barry Byrne shows a continuation of the Prairie School idea in a highly individualistic manner which shows assimilation of the contemporary work of the Californian, Irving Gill.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description: in lands, part of Block 4 of the South Shore Subdivision number 5 of the eastern half of the southeastern quarter of Section 24, Township 38, Range 14.

Chain of title: from the Chicago Title and Trust Company, tract book 401-3. John Francis Kenna originally bought the land on which the apartment building was to stand in two large parcels, falling on both sides of the center line of Block 4. The first part to be purchased was the southern 200 feet of the east half of the block, which John F. Kenna purchased from James Stewert, September 26, 1913 (Document 5289426). The second parcel consisting of the southernmost 80 feet of the west half of the block, Kenna purchased from Frank A. Naas, December 16, 1914 (Document 5557160). Kenna added to this western portion by purchasing the forty feet lying to the north of his eighty foot parcel from Earl Moffatt, December 1, 1921 (Document L144213). At this point Kenna owned the entire southern end of the block, which he parceled out and sold or lost from 1921 through 1925, leaving a center lot measuring 120 feet deep north of 69th Street and 82 feet three inches wide along the street. The center line of the block ran through the lot twelve-and-a-half feet from the eastern boundary. By 1928, when Kenna sold this lot, the apartment building was twelve years old. Kenna sold this center lot to Samuel and Sadie Grossman, September 20, 1928 (Document LR428457). The Grossmans granted the

property to Genvieve Grossman, February 23, 1933 (Document LR606981). Miss Grossman granted the lot to Maurice J. Flynn, July 18, 1935 (Document LR699999). Flynn granted the lot to the Mortgage and Real Estate Corporation (by quit claim not deed in trust), August 1, 1936 (Document LR738864). This corporation then placed the deed in trust with the Chicago Title and Trust Company, August 1, 1936 (Document LR738866) which was never redeemed. Consequently, the Chicago Title and Trust Company granted the deed to Alex Markels, November 16, 1944 (Document LRL033534). The Markels mortgaged the property with the Liberty National Bank of Chicago, January 18, 1945 (Document LRL040586) which they never redeemed. The Liberty Bank then granted half interest to the property to each of two men: Julius A. Polikoff and Joseph C. Cowen, July 28, 1947 (Document LRL160843). Joseph C. Cowen mortgaged his half interest with the Exchange National Bank of Chicago, April 9, 1952. The Exchange Bank granted the half interest deed to Rose Husman, February 26, 1964 (Document LR2147647). Julius A. Polikoff sold his half interest to Harold and Juanita Pates, April 30, 1964 (Document LR2147646). The Pates, the present owners of the property, consolidated their position by purchasing the outstanding half interest from Rose Husman, May 1, 1964 (Document LR2147648).

2. Date of erection: 1916. The City of Chicago Department of Buildings has a record of building permit number A39505, which was issued May 9, 1916 for this building.
3. Architect: Francis Barry Byrne (1883-1967).
4. Original plan and construction of the building: Byrne relates that John Francis Kenna, an accountant with a large Chicago firm, came to him and asked Byrne to design an apartment building. Having few preconceived ideas concerning architecture, or as Byrne puts it, being "architecturally unselfconscious," Kenna readily accepted the judgement of the architect. Byrne recounts that Kenna was so satisfied with the results that he doubled the rent of the units from \$60.00 per month to \$120.00, and was still able to keep the building occupied at all times. The Kennas lived on the top floor with Mr. Kenna's aged father. The building cost approximately \$12,000 in 1916, and was built on what was flat open prairie that stretched south of Jackson Park. Only a few other buildings were standing in the area at that time. /Francis Barry Byrne, tape recorded interview conducted on August 17, 1967, at his home, 1013 Ridge Avenue, Evanston, Illinois./

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Francis Barry Byrne (1883-1967) was born in Chicago in 1883 and became interested in architecture at age nineteen when he saw the work of Frank Lloyd Wright published in the Chicago Architectural Club magazine. In 1902, without any building experience or a high school education, Byrne entered Wright's office in Oak Park remaining until 1908. He left the office and joined Walter Burley Griffin before leaving for Seattle to set up a partnership with Andrew Willatzen. The firm was short-lived and after its termination four years later, Byrne visited California where he was particularly impressed with the work of Irving Gill. At the request of Griffin, who was at this time very involved with the supervision of the construction of Canberra, Byrne returned to Chicago to take over Griffin's work when he went to Australia. By 1917, Byrne had dispatched Griffin's responsibility, and had set up his own practice.

In an interview shortly before his death, Barry Byrne stated that he was particularly satisfied with the Kenna Apartment building as part of his oeuvre. He felt that it was link between the strictness of his early work as exemplified in the chemistry building he did for the University of New Mexico in continuing Griffin's responsibilities there, and his later more lyrical work represented by his residences during the twenties. Byrne felt that this building influenced his later work to a significant degree.

Alfonso Iannelli (1888-1965), the renowned sculptor who worked with Frank Lloyd Wright on the Midway Gardens, collaborated closely with Byrne, continuing up until the time of the latter's retirement from active practice in 1941. Iannelli fashioned the two panels which flank the entry of the building. These figures (which Byrne felt should not be viewed as symbolic), face outward and are expressed in smooth, graceful curves which soften and complement the strict lines of the architecture itself. At the point of entry into the building, these two panels bring the scale of the building down to a very intimate level.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Unpublished sources:

Byrne, Francis Barry. Tape recorded interview conducted on August 17, 1967, at his home, 1013 Ridge Avenue, Evanston, Illinois.

Chappell, Sally A. Interview conducted on August 17, 1967, at her home, 512 Lee Street, Evanston, Illinois. (Note: Miss Chappell is currently writing her doctoral dissertation on the work of Francis Barry Byrne.)

2. Published sources:

Behrendt, Walter Curt. Modern Building. New York:
Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1937.

Brooks, H. Allen. "The Chicago School," Journal of the
Society of Architectural Historians, XXV (May, 1966),
115-118.

_____. "The Prairie School." Unpublished
Ph.D. dissertation, Art Department, Northwestern
University, 1957.

Byrne, Francis Barry. "On Frank Lloyd Wright and His
Atelier," American Institute of Architects Journal,
XXXIX, No. 6 (June, 1963), 109-112.

_____. "On Training for the Architect,"
Liturgical Arts, XIII (May, 1945), 56-62.

_____. "Wright and Iannelli," Architectural
Record, CXXIX (January, 1961), 242, 246.

Chappell, Sally A. "Barry Byrne, Architect: His Formative
Years," The Prairie School Review, III, No. 4 (Last
Quarter 1966), 5-22.

Contains a number of photographs of Byrne's work
and a comprehensive bibliography. Views of the Kenna
apartment building are on pages 21-22.

"Evolution of a Personal Style as Shown in the Work of
Barry Byrne and Ryan Co.," The Western Architect,
XXXIII (March-June, 1924), 30-31, 35.

Contains two excellent illustrations (Plates
eleven and twelve) of the exterior and the entrance.

Griggs, Joseph. "Alfonso Iannelli, the Prairie Spirit
in Sculpture," The Prairie School Review, II, No. 4
(Last Quarter 1965), 5-23.

Tallmadge, Thomas E. "The Thirtieth Annual Architectural
Exhibit in Chicago," The Western Architect, XXV
(April, 1917), 27-28.

D. Supplemental Information

"In this issue we present some examples of the work of Barry
Byrne and Ryan Company, Architects, Chicago, to point out,
among other things, the fresh, original and personal trend
that the recent work of the firm has taken (see Frontispiece)
and the evolution (typical after all in the sense that it is
the way of arrival of all original and personal expressions)

through which the firm's work has passed in arriving at its present, somewhat individual vernacular."

...
"A Commission of the next year (1916) shows unmistakably the trend which Mr. Byrne's work is taking. The handling of the dark-golden brick-work of the Clarke residence anticipates, in a way, the expression that we find in the apartment for Mr. John Travis Kenna [sic.], Chicago; but in the latter structure we find a complete emancipation from the forms or manner of the teacher [Wright]. Here, simple brick, with straightforward openings, are accepted facts, and the designer sets out to do the best he can with the materials at hand and in the most economical manner. It goes without saying that it is more difficult to design a simple thing than one slightly more ornate or involved, for in the utterly simple the total appeal and interest must come through perfect proportion.

It is difficult to say whether or not we can at once accept the mass that the Kenna Apartment presents in such a view as that shown on Plate XI. Our inability may be at once charged up, it seems, to our previous architectural associations. Certainly much of the structural integrity and architectural logic that Mr. Byrne's early training inculcated is expressed here. The materials are used with a naive simplicity and adorable straightforwardness, the only elements of adornment being the little chevron-decorated moulding around the windows and the two delightful panels by Mr. Alfonso Iannelli, the sculptor and decorator, who is responsible for the sculptural and color notes of the firm's work.

These panels, typical of the creative instincts of the two elements of the race, the male and female, are most appropriate to the home, and it is to be hoped that the panel depicting motherhood is here symbolical of the facts, and not so out-of-place as it would generally be upon most apartment house structures from which children, like animals, are excluded." Page 31.

...
"In all the work herewith presented, Mr. Byrne has had the fullest measure of understanding and cooperation from Mr. Iannelli, the sculptor and decorator, with whom he collaborates in this work."

Page 35

["Evolution of a Personal Style as Shown in the Work of Barry Byrne and Ryan Co.," The Western Architect, XXXIII (March-June, 1924), pp. 31, 35.]

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Although this building has the simple treatment of volumes and surfaces, it lacks the complete proscription of ornament seen later in modern architecture.

2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Rectangular; approximately 53' x 66'; three stories.
2. Foundations: Concrete.
3. Wall construction: Brick. Front and connecting portions of the sides are of hard-surfaced light yellow brick with raked horizontal joints and narrow, flush vertical joints. Rest of exterior walls are of common red brick with flush joints. Where the angled portions of the window walls meet, the bricks are cut to overlap slightly in alternate courses, creating a decorative pattern that derives from the needs of construction and the nature of the materials.
4. Structural system: Wood floors and partitions. The arched cellar windows are spanned by brickwork arches. The face brick of these arches are tapered.
5. Porches, stoops: Stoop at entrance is concrete. The garden wall at the entrance is of the same materials as front wall of the building. The service stairway is of wood.
6. Chimneys: Brick, matching front walls.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance door is a flush door with a glazed opening. The door frame is simple. At each side of the door are cast concrete sculptured panels, one of a male figure holding a book and the other of a woman holding a child. There is a decorated lintel.
 - b. Windows: The sash are inward opening wood casements glazed in single panes of glass set in wood stops, avoiding the problems of cracking putty. The frames for windows occurring in yellow brick walls are unusually wide and are worked to a chevron design in four receding planes. The vertical mullion has a diamond pattern. These frames appear to be of wood and, with the sash, are painted dark green.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Flat; built-up roofing.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Parapet cap: concrete.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Each floor contains one apartment. The first floor apartment was inspected. The living room is at the front and the room with the bay window is a sun room or enclosed porch. The entrance hall and living room connect by means of a four-foot wide opening; pairs of narrow double doors at each side of the fire place connect with the dining room and with the sun room. There is no open plan. The kitchen with its exterior service stair is at the east side close to the three car garage. The three bedrooms and two baths, are at the rear and west side, accessible from a hallway connecting with the entrance hall.
2. Stairways: A three and a half story stairway connects with the entrance vestibule and gives access to each apartment. The exterior yellow brickwork is carried into the entrance vestibule.
3. Flooring: Generally oak strip flooring has been used. The sun porch is paved in 6" x 6" dark red tiles, and resilient flooring is used in the kitchen.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster with a smooth finish. Wallpaper has been applied in entrance and rear hallways.
5. Doorways and doors: The pairs of doors at each side of the fire place have wood stiles and rails and single full-height glass panes set in wood stops. Other doors in this apartment have been replaced with modern flush doors as have the entrance doors to the first and second floor apartments. That of the third floor apartment is the original, a single panel wood door. The stops, the door frame trim and the window trim are milled with simple molding profiles using flat planes rather than curved planes.
6. Decorative features and trim: The baseboard is milled to match the trim. The picture molding has a simple curve. The fireplace front appears to be cast in one piece, including jambs and lintel, with a decorative panel above the opening of sculptured figures of children in relief.
7. Lighting, type of fixtures: Electric. Fixtures are conventional.
8. Heating: Central, hot water.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: The front faces south. The buildings around are of similar age and construction. The neighborhood is made up of apartment houses. The streets are narrow, admitting only a lane of one-way traffic between parked cars at both curbs. But trees line the streets; the buildings are well built and well maintained, and the location some five miles south of the Loop and about a half mile from the shore of Lake Michigan contribute toward the residential quality of the area in contrast to the substandard conditions only a little further inland.
2. Outbuildings: The three car garage adjoins the building on the east and is of the same construction.

Prepared by Wesley Shank
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
July 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The records of this structure were made during the 1967 Chicago IV Project. This was the fourth in a series of summer projects designed to record the significant architecture of the Chicago area. The project was sponsored by the late Mr. Earl J. Reed, FAIA. He was assisted by John R. Fugard, FAIA, Treasurer, and Miss Agnes E. Hodges of the Chicago Chapter Foundation, and a Selection Committee consisting of James Arkin, AIA; Ruth Schoneman, Art Institute of Chicago; and J. Carson Webster, Northwestern University. Organizations cooperating with HABS in this project were: The Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects; the Chicago Chapter Foundation; the Chicago Community Trust; the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies; the Illinois Arts Council; and the Chicago Heritage Committee. The Council also made funds available for a Statewide Inventory Project with out-of-Chicago architects cooperating. Quarters were provided at Glessner House through the Chicago School of Architecture Foundation.

Mr. James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey, was in over-all charge of HABS summer programs. The Project Supervisor was Wesley Shank, Iowa State University. Other members of the summer team were: Historian, Leland Roth, University of Illinois, Urbana; Photographer, Philip Turner; Secretary, Mrs. Burt Schloss; and Student Assistant Architects: Keleal Nassin, Tulane University; Maurice Griffin, Illinois Institute of Technology; Allan Steenhusen and David Vyverberg, Iowa State University.